

# Navigating history in anthropology (Seminar)

Modern witches and expanded historicities

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The historical turn in the 1980s demonstrated how historical dimensions are integral to anthropological research. However, presenting a viable historical context does not necessarily take into account the varieties of historical experiences. Modern witches in the UK have long been grappling with claims about the past through a range of historical registers – empirical, mythic, material, sensory, and even magical. In this talk, Helen Cornish (Goldsmiths) considers how these expanded witchcraft historicities can help think about everyday history-making.

Yeah, let's go little here progress.

Good evening everybody and thank you so much for coming along today. And thank you everybody on Zoom for joining as well. And it's an enormous pleasure to be introducing Helen Cornish to talk to us tonight on her research on Wickham witchcraft communities in modern UK and we were going to Helen was with us last term already doing helping out facilitating the panel that we had on anthropology and the environment and we hope to do more of that in the future. We had to hold on Helen's talk last term because of the ucu strike. So especially pleased that she's come back to do it today. Hey, the best thing is to hand over.

Thank you.

Oh.

Thank you. Thank you very much. Can I just check because there's another row now behind you. Can you hear me? All right, hooray.

So thank you Camila and Chris for inviting me back to come and share some of my research about modern Witchcraft and thinking historically so I'm really looking forward to sharing some of my research and to put into to talk about questions of how we are making histories and how this works and we're thinking about modern witchcraft traditions and historical knowledge. So to start with this is the Museum of Witchcraft and magic in boss castle in Cornwall where I've carried out quite a lot of my research some of you are nodding. You probably know this place.

Maybe quite well, it's very very well visited but and it's been in Cornwall for about 70 years now 60 70 years.

Can't add up. So and in the museum is the wise woman's Cottage and in the guide book of a few years ago the wise woman who is conventionally known as Joan it describes her as tending to all manner of needs within the local community the wise woman or cunning man had a deep knowledge of Nature and a link to the land and the seasons and She's surrounded by repurposed domestic items foraged materials. And this room was built by Graham King who was the owner and curator of the museum between 1997 and 2013. He took over the Museum from its founder Cecil Williamson who set it up in the fifties, and he he took out various displays reinstalled this Cottage and brought in all sorts of bits of the collection in order to give Joan the wise woman these Tarot cards in front of her spells hanging from the walls all of these things all of these kind of borish materials and at this time when this was made the late 1990s, it was a particularly crucial time in reimagining histories of modern Witchcraft and Graham Kings installation brought Williamson's collection

of folk magic and esoteric belongings of those West country Wayside witches into the light. It made these techniques and skills visible and it really brought together perhaps this idea of a sensory an experiential Heritage now today, the museum is owned and curated by Simon Costan and he continues to show us how many of these skills and techniques are working there today and I'm interested in how these ideas are embraced by today's modern magical religious witches wickers and traditional witches or under all sorts of names.

One particular kind of strand in history making in process. I'm interested in what kind of history is being told what sources are being used what counts as evidence? Is it a history of today's witchcraft? Is it a history for today's witches? There's all of these things and it's kind of building on Cecil Williamson's ideas from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century about this notion of the Wayside, which the silent quiet world where which is our walking with one foot in the mundane world and one in the in the world of spirit, but I'll come back to that later.

I need to talk a little bit about to explain these ideas about, contemporary witchcraft as a Thoroughly Modern magical religious true practice, very creative very inventive, but whilst simultaneously fashioned as revitalizing traditional even ancient customs.

There are many traditions and labels around and these also have their own historical trajectories and I started this research 20 more than 20 years ago and then it was very common to find labels like wicker and Witchcraft and traditional which being used in interchangeable ways. People would tell me that well Wickers what you use when you are talking to people who might be a bit scared and it feels less threatening than Witchcraft and today 20 years later. You don't hear that so much people are much more concerned to say wicker belongs to a very particular kind of lineage maybe connected to General Gardner or to other mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, which is whereas traditional which craft as I will go on to explain become something that has a very different kind of heritage and this kind of entangled vocabulary is the thing that I'm really interested in how these things change what kind of evidence is used? There are a couple of caveats.

My focus is not a revised empirical history. I'm not here to tell you what the history or one of multiple histories of modern witchcraft is there are plenty of historians who can do that and do that work beautifully.

I don't particularly suggest that the history of whichcraft is silenced or forgotten and I think we're all, we're very aware of how much I the idea of Witchcraft and historical witches are continually being discussed in the media and in popular domains, there might be evidence of it that we might want to think about how they are lost or forgotten or silenced, but we're talking about that a lot. So that's maybe another question.

What I'm interested in is that really nubby problem. What is history? How do we calculate it? What kinds of things are used for evidence? How is this sort of dominant historicism based on objective history. So Central to the claims that we might make what is seen as authoritative or reliable? Now there are lots of other anthropologists who are interested in questions of modern magical Witchcraft and ideas about magic

and while I am interested in how these things are understood it. Is this curiosity about history that drives my questions and I but I very quickly learned. I think that an understanding of magicality was very important to understanding how magical practitioners think about the past.

It's well established as I'm sure you're all very familiar that versions of History are not stable official versions are challenged. We have new ideas that are proposed new interpretations different evidence arrive silences are given voice and so on but these are always in flux. It's always in process. What counts as those very forms of evidence is unstable. Not just the particular interpretations. It always depends doesn't it on who is doing the telling and the showing and the looking the listening all of these things? I'm interested in how those narrowly defined definitions of History through material traces empirical evidence can be expanded. You know, how can we maybe include things like singing or walking? What kinds of ways do we include materiality? What about embodiment on the census music ritual? But these have to work alongside not alternative to.

Professional histories empirical histories myths story memory folklore. I think we don't mistake these from empirical histories, but we have to think about how they are entangled. What are the varieties of historical experiences? in the present So I'm going to tell you a really simplified story forgive me of the Ebbs and flows of modern witchcraft historiography since it emerged in the public arena in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. And this is one that draws on empirical histories and ethnographic experience and memory and myth and all of these things.

It has been shown by historians such as Ronald Hutton very successfully that modern witchcraft is not an ancient but it's a highly modern form of spirituality but fashioned, as I said as an older religion one, which is which has spiritual values ideals practices of pagan ancestors, at its kind of at its Center drawing on Earth mistress borrowing from New Age principles that focus on personal transformation through creative rituals practitioners often take on a polytheistic view of divinity many Embrace and animistic cosmology where a kernel of liveness in habits all of the natural world and there are often perhaps different perspectives on the notion of continuity with the past.

So modern witchcraft framed as a revitalization of ancient practices Gerald Gardner here bursting onto the scene a retired civil servant with a long Colonial history burst into the British media in the 1950s. He had a very clear origin on this particular kind of Witchcraft. He declared he had stumbled across the surviving remnants of an ancient pan-european fertility cult, which craft he had found it deep in the heart of the New Forest on the south coast of England.

Almost exactly remarkably like the Witchcraft the Witchcraft cult described by Margaret Murray twenty years earlier in her which Cult of Western Europe and initiatory religion led by priestesses the old religion of England now Margaret Murray and her speculative methods in the 1920s really had informed a public idea of this continuity of Witchcraft and her entry in the Britannica the Encyclopedia Britannica

was there from the 30s to I think the late 60s even the 70s a really long time. So it was very authoritative in many ways. Although very disputed by historians.

Murray and then Gardener built on 19<sup>th</sup> century evolutionary Anthropologist James Fraser's theory of contagious magic ideas of mythical King Cults and the green man this coherent cycle of the death and Rebirth of divine King it echoed James Leyland, it's Charles Charles Leyland an Italian folklorist who declared he had uncovered the evidence for a medieval group of witches, and there were other 19<sup>th</sup> century theorists such as the worship of the great mother goddess that get into woven into these histories and it's important perhaps to note that these are quite literary strands all this remaking and imagining histories of Witchcraft, but there isn't really One Moment In These the pinpoint where there was a stable history. So it's kind of complicated.

Gardener described this substantial well organized movement.

He described how it was almost run out of society in the late medieval period by a ferocious Christian church and state and in the face of persecution, which is became silent. They retreated to the Shadows meeting only in secret and transmitting nor knowledge orally down through the generations while in the public domain magical expertise fell away until only traces were left surviving oral traditions and Rural Customs until given Life by gardener.

His cousin and his Publications things like witchcraft today and all through the media calling all cousins. For example.

Television interviews with him, they were widely publicized and he collaborated briefly with Cecil Williamson who was opening the Museum of Witchcraft at that time on the Isle of Man. He later sold it to Gardner Williamson returned to the mainland later settled in Cornwall, that this was the story and from that time modern magical religious initiatory witchcraft continued to gain strength and numbers so over the second half of the century gardeners presence as a public which was joined by Alexander's Cochrane during Valiente many others all with distinct perspectives on continuity with the past through these claims to surviving paganism bringing in things like ancient Egyptian magic cunning Traditions, which craft flow to North America and Back Again reconfigured as women's Mysteries as feminist Traditions resident connections with the peace movement Progressive politics, it becomes this very rich movement, but With this cool. This core sense of unbroken continuities from ancient times.

So expert historians such as Ronald Hutton have investigated this whether there is any evidence from this claims and there are now but it doesn't make it a fiction because of all these complicated these rich literary sources. It didn't spring from gardeners imagination hot and beautifully demonstrates as I will talk about a little bit more. They're very fertile combination of intellectual artistic romantic European movements from the 18<sup>th</sup> century that were intertwined with practices of ritual magic folklore spiritualism, and so on Rich sources of inspiration, So there's a problem of continuity evidence reliability.

The origin story presented by Gardener as a factual and continuous history of Witchcraft was no longer seen as credible but it hadn't been seen as particularly credible by historians in the 1950s. So there's lots of voices here.

But there were these deep public resonances. It worked as an authoritative and legitimate origin story a history for an emergent modern witchcraft movement, but As this goes history and practice a really intimately entwined. The history is the practice the practice is the history. How do we start to even begin to unpick these things? But slowly from the 1980s these continuities were challenged concerned begun to Bubble amongst which is and Pagan communities that this origin story was not supported by the empirical record.

Questions like well, what's the history of modern witchcraft? What counted as evidence? How much did it matter? In America in the 1970s and between 1970s and 1990s people like Aidan Kelly, for example.

He suggested that gardeners writing.

Prove that there were much closer connections with ritual magic and Alexander Alex Aleister Crowley that with pre-christian paganism.

Visible in his creativity and the demonstrable influence of a cultism and ritual Magic on his practice. This was evidence for a creative new religion not this kind of careful closed continuities Unbroken.

The sociologist Margot Margo Adler carried out a substantial survey in America in the 1980s and she asserted that it was very well known amongst practitioners that Garden story was a myth rather than a history, but this was not really reflected in the research that I was doing 20 years. Later.

In the early 90s. I've got a bit from wicker chat here Julia Phillips presented at the Canberra Wickham conference with a critical overview of gardeners research of the history of wicker and Gardener's claims. The source is he used her text in the early internet was rapidly disseminated and it provided a really valuable resource for increasing numbers of practitioners across the world and these connections. I think between the UK and North America Australia are really vibrant at this time.

it's got more scholarly circles the Anthropologist Tanya larman suggested that London witches deliberately blurred distinctions between history and myth Susan Greenwood later suggested that they were quite aware of the difference, but preferred to honor a past related in myth other Scholars.

This anthropologists are being the magioko demonstrated the role of folklore in Garden area.

Witchcraft historical practices and urges readers to recognize the creative value of vernacular practices simultaneously setting out how claims to unbroken continuity are implausible but manifest at the same time.

so Ronald Hutton is a Triumph of the moves a particular marker. I think in some of this history.

He meticulously demonstrated how Garden area and orthodoxes what unreliable as one of the sources he used.

Excuse me.

But crucially he offered an alternative a carefully plotted trajectory of those creative artistic and literary sources philosophical aesthetic occult strands building together for these fertile ground.

It was a product of a creative modernity not a residue of traditional practice. He even suggested that Pagan witchcraft was the first religion that England had offered the world. So there's all sorts of things that come in it was given a thorough airing. This book was published just as I started doing my film work in London in Cornwall in Brighton.

He generously gave talks up and down the country conferences and workshops and book launches and around these there are other conferences other workshops book groups mutes that were dedicated discussing his claims at the Pagan Federation conference in 2001.

30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, it was in Fairfield halls in Croydon. Lots of these talks were people that Marion green Janet Veron Gavin bone were focused on what is history. How do we Evans it? What is that what our responses to these anxieties of historical evidence that have been bubbling? And there were kind of two main camps.

It's hugely simplified some passionately argued that the lack of evidence did not mean an Evidence of black. They challenge the interpretation of the documentary record, which craft had been transmitted orally. It was secret. They claimed historians such as Hutton had a biased research agenda and ignored the history that were taught inside covers. You needed to be an initiate to know.

They propose that history was written by the winners, which is had been silenced left little Trace.

On the other hand people found it a breath of fresh air.

This recognition that the empirical history was scant made it impossible to be taken seriously in the public eye anything else left, which is open to mockery many people. Look foolish. It was foolish to believe that those began survivalists theories were factual and there were a lot of people who said these are fake history. These are kind of, pseudo historians. There was a lot of this language around but they're quiet kind of polarizing either. It's all true or it's all fake.

But they argue that this need to have a viable history really mattered on Interfaith platforms. And this was a real growing concern as Pagans were and which is were finding new spaces the due to things like advocacy groups such as the Pagan Federation. There were whole internet projects that were dedicated to sharing and expanding arguing that you needed objective standards of historical evidence against which factuality could be measured. This is really old internet style prior to prior to internet searches you had things like weberings you could join so that, you were all in a little community and you could have you could share lists of links. Thanks to the way back machine. We still have it and there were lots of talks about these things but So there you go pagans about Gates bad history. They're asking things like what is bad history? How do we

why should we be against it? What can we do? How can we make sure our websites are fully accurate? and with some notable exceptions, I think.

Round about 2005 it was generally accepted by practitioners that those unbroken continuities might offer valuable Foundation myths but not a viable history.

Recognition that gardenerian accounts were at best Mythic Foundation stories provided some Solace for some but I think over the last 10 years or so, even these ideas have fallen by the wayside a bit. I don't tend to hear.

Them being presented. Yeah, please tell me otherwise.

But I think it also shows how much these are flowing ideas.

But then I have some questions. I think there are always more questions. What seems like perhaps an ordinary account of a historiographical record. That is gradually brought up to date slowly aligned to objective evidence while discarding those outdated ideas.

But it's not that simple.

I'd not disagree with the historians. I'm not suggesting the problem is empirical or on a lack of evidence.

My concern is that if we think that it only emphasizes those dominant modes of evidence and it reinforces that soft power of a rationalist historiography. I want to turn to something else. I want to include a more experiential and less logical form of history of history-making. So this kind of more expanded idea. It's a different kind of challenge.

so and the reason why I had these questions really is perhaps contrary to expectations the outcome of shining the light of history of realist histories onto the history of modern witchcraft didn't mean that I started to hear about those empirical historical foundations. The history of Witchcraft didn't seem to become something that was rooted in a very everyday sense of those 18<sup>th</sup> century artistic creative movements, but it kind of became something else things like ancient Egyptian magic started to take precedence or because I was spending most of my research time down at the Museum of Witchcraft the role of the Wise Women the idea of a more vernacular form of magic that these things started to dominate the Notions of History, so It was another kind of history that was being brought in or together. There was something else and these practices were being brought in as a sense that they weren't.

Formal history that everybody knew that the history were the empirical history were perhaps scant or in other places literary? But the history of practice was something that you would take seriously people have been practicing magic people had been engaging with other worldly Communications that these were Alternative forms of history of practice that could elide those empirical accounts. It didn't risk accusations of mistaking with the history or blurring these categories of knowledge and you could have a more emotional or embodied or ritualistic attachment to the Past and one of the things that this generated I think is this kind of change in vocabulary these distinctions between a garden area on the one hand and ideas about a more vernacular traditional witchcraft on the other.

As is I think depicted by.

Here we go back to Joan in her Cottage and this putting together of this installation by Graham King in the 90s. It's part as of part of shaping as well as reflecting these changes.

I just Knights take a moment really to step away from the my witchcraft discussions and my needs kind of more expanded histories and think about what it means to do an anthropology of History rather than a historical.

Anthropology and what it might mean to think of these expanded historicities and that term itself needs some attention because I think we're all used to that conventional historians historicists notes and historicity as being that empirical evidence that we measure against that that is how we evaluate literal factuality here in antipological discussions about historicity. It means something it means that we're able to attend to those more cultural perceptions of the past grounded in temporality to consider how we learn about evaluate because through the past in all kinds of ways where time is not perhaps considered or at least experienced as linear and this orderly sense of past present and future is not always stable.

History as an analytical category has been an anthropological question, since the 1980s since before we can think of Evan's Pritchard in the 1950s even but in the 1980s there was that recognition that culture is historical but hot on the heels of that was this recognition that history is also cultural and what that means.

So more recently.

Historically anthropologists such as Charles Stuart writes about historicity and as a way of recognizing of attending to that fundamental relationality of knowledge of the past that it is in itself part of this changing idea of what we do and we know that questions of historical objectivity that whole history of ideas as long as established this notion that objective history is problematic.

In the 1980s, we might want to think of people like Trullio for example in silencing the past setting out to challenge assumptions about historical practices and processes through his analysis of the Haten revolution.

Where his questioning not just historical accounts in which coloniality made it impossible to explain the the uprising the Revolutionary uprisings.

But he also wanted to incorporate a broader set of narrators politicians religious leaders journalists and in civil associations and citizens, not just the work of professional historians.

With all of their agendas and interests which kind of revealed the changing size and relevance and complexity of how history is produced inside and outside Academia to consider how these overlaps between history of social processes history as knowledge fluid and unstable.

Famously silence is islands of History address that problem by examining structures. How do events become historical? But there are other work like custom in the early 90s setting out how established Notions of historical realism a forged through ideas about scientific knowledge classification rooted in European enlightenment.

But crystallized by Notions of temporality where history is done and fixed and over perhaps, subject to revision but fixed and more ethnographic approaches by people like Lambert For example set out to show how these established ideas can be reconfigured historicity enables a more holistic understanding of history-making paying attention to how the past is articulated formulated in the present and how it's apprehended in flow.

There are I think similar arguments that we can pick up about the imagination and the senses how they have been downplayed in enlightenment philosophers through Visionary power of scientific hypotheses.

For example, the role of poetic invention in stories of progress and other Grand narratives, we could think of the work of anthropologist Tim enguld who takes modern Sciences to task for their insistence that the Realms of reality and the imagination, should not be confused.

Susan Greenwood argues and challenges academic theories of magic marginalized by Western cultural history how they how it always fails against rationalist criteria instead. She offers magical Consciousness and associative thinking where the imagine that is taken seriously and encourages attention to the interrelatedness of all things. We could think of Sabina mavioko's account of participatory Consciousness. I'm really enchantment which is crucial she says to our experience of humanity the ecologist David Abraham here in his spell of the sense urges readers to recognize that making sense requires essential awareness rather than a literal truth and he recommends a more animated perspective of the world and by borrowing from these I think we can.

Start to situate different questions about historical knowledge historical experience and practice.

Other forms can be included in our in our scope.

We can look at ethnographies of History.

Lambert again studies how madagascan Spirit mediums bear the burden of the past as they face the future it erupts through performance and interpretation in rituals Charles Stewart set phonography of dreaming on the Greek island of access dreams are taken seriously as forms of historical consciousness as evidence for the retrieval of buried icons that have been found under the emery mites.

during times of precarity closer to home Giovanna parmigiana's use of an expanded temporality to explore the nuances of history and tradition. She tooks at how small groups of pagan dances.

You know dance complex history of community of women's histories into being as a form of spiritual practice and it untethers linear temporality and these are not historical ethnographists strictly, but they don't attempt to adjudicate between an empirical count and local versions. They are all present.

It's to do with making histories in the moment. It recognizes these different varieties of historical registers and it brings those objective empirical histories into the same conversation into the same set of processes as myth and memory and folklore and

these more vernacular ideas and it's useful I think because it doesn't downplay or marginalize or separate the everyday production but of the past by practitioners.

It recognizes these different approaches. It brings them into the same conversation and it also I think perhaps helps us challenge these Notions these dominant Notions of European historicity produced through Enlightenment and scientific principles. It helps us see how that is. Also how history is culturally made it is not perhaps so obvious these ideas of linear fixed Notions. It's not the case in practice.

It doesn't evaluate one kind of knowledge.

Against realist criteria and say well it works for the people in practice, but it doesn't really do as a history and it helps us put these things it weaves those really strands through our experience.

I think it's important to say that I'm not arguing that this undermines or challenges necessary totally those objective standards of Western historiography. But what it's doing is it attempts to dislodge them somewhat to a dislodge their dominance in how we understand how historical worlds are made and remade so we're not measuring always against that standard Western historicism.

That it takes into account amateur histories.

Professional histories, but also it includes the people who don't consider themselves historians of any kind, but we're all making history.

So, how does that work? now back to Joan in ton, so as I explained counter I think perhaps to counter to expectations. I'm not so certain but counter to something the outcome of that really scrutiny of the history of the history of modern witchcraft.

Around the time of the the 21<sup>st</sup> century was not a dedication to to those empirical foundational threads traced by Hutton in Triumph. Those his intellectual artistic esoteric movements. They did not become the things that everybody talked about. But instead there was this realigning of expectations of of those those interpretations with these other things that people were doing these alternative ways of connecting to the Past through vernacular practices of magic through the pivot towards folk magic cunning experts as a far more emotional engagement and this is what I started to understand when I took part in seasonal rituals, and I walked the Cornish Cliffs. I joined workshops on chanting or how to see fairies or took part in spiral dancing. I walked around the museum with visitors Keen to visit their favorite objects.

Who would introduce me to them as old friends? and show them as active examples of folk magic tell me their history and their, their Futures and their expectations and these were vibrant nodes in Dynamic forms of history-making in which Wise Women offered emotional access to the Deep past an evocative round in which people could put down historical Roots but not as objective or even Mythic origin stories, but in the name of experience and the imagination So from this perspective, it didn't matter how people who had engaged with the spirit world had organized in days gone by it was that they did it that mattered and as such a contributed to those kinds of historical experiences that resonate with senses of an inspired world.

An animated world and it was a refashion kind of continuity created these spaces to draw on these more experiential and emotional sources through things like ritual and the landscape the senses much more poetical and there's all sorts of ways in which the landscape around the museum itself is brought into these these histories through visiting waterfalls and carvings in the rock face and the grave of one of the Grave where the skeleton that had once been displayed in the museum is now buried that is brought into these ways of making history.

But today I'm particularly interested in the rise of the wise woman as an ancestor.

clearly this notion of the wise woman of oral folk magic is not it's not a new Trope in thinking through history as a magic and Witchcraft. It's well entrenched and a historical reality, but it's a shifting place and the shifting sense in modern witchcraft histories. But Gardener we can think of how he borrowed from those 19<sup>th</sup> century survivalists theories and Margaret Murray's arguments the Wise Women offered some kind of bridge but a sort of an objective bridge between Antiquity and modernity a holding place for those remnants of those Pagan Neolithic priestesses.

The Wise Women had already featured in those mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century claims about hereditary or traditional practices offering esoteric knowledge and initiation sometimes and the cunning folk and never far I think from those female soothsayers of 1980s reclaiming histories.

They were iconic Rebel women, perhaps demonstrable resistance against the patriarchal power and the Wise Women I think are also evoked by the rise of solitary practitioners modern witches, from the 19 late 80s onwards and tethering from these Notions of from initiation that it's spaces to be a solitary practitioner where the wise woman becomes this ancestor and they all all of these ideas come into play but as historians Ronald Hutton Owen Davis Diane Perkins have pointed out.

While there is plenty of evidence of folk magic of cunning histories in the archives. There is no traceable lineage between cunningfolk and modern witchcraft that any more than there are of those ancient continuities. So according to that conventional really criteria.

This is also part of modern mythmaking. It's another bad history and it's another one that those pagans against Bad history were also warning against and but because I think of this shift in his expanding these historical ideas then the Wise Women can become.

That source of practical ancestry through that experiential history of esoteric knowledge not through the written record. And this is Amplified. I think throughout other revised displays in the museum of Witchcraft. There are all sorts of objects this focus on the Wayside which the folk which with one foot in the spirit world and the other in the mundane life of the village.

When Cecil Williamson opened his Museum in the 1950s. He said that he sought out those Grassroots workers of magic those Wise Women and witches. He said call them what you will but they will contribute to this understanding of the spirit world and witchcraft.

but like Gardener Williamson's historical accounting maybe has something to be desired his acquisition record doesn't necessarily meet the objective standards that we would expect it is unreliable. He had very lengthy labels.

These are grams reduce legs his lengthy labels recounted stories of intrigue and magical histories and they were full of contradictions informants were anonymized they were heavily disguised and there was very little Trace in the public record. So there are other perhaps layers to think about this but Researchers who have carried out and quite detailed, formal historical research on some of Williams and objects.

Usually reveal that there are, there are there are evidential histories behind this but this storytaking was part of his curatorial practice and at the heart of the museum again, we have Joan sitting there.

surrounded by these re-purposed items these borish materials made into made into light and I think it is in these objects.

These folk magic these amulets these trinkets protective display Charles and sympathetic magic in these displays spells to heal for Revenge it is this that appeals to many visitors the use of those found objects repurposed domestic items. You'll find spoons and cauldrons.

Brushes mirrors tambourines and so forth fishing floats used as objects for scrying for seeing into the future. There are glass knitting needles other repurposed domestic items.

There are Links of ropes that are tied to hold the wind inside ready to re-released. There are Rowan Twigs, which are tied with strands of red thread.

There's all sorts of wrapped boxes found at Crossroads, which bottle Spirits houses all of these contain these unseen things and it works as part of a seasonal round a sequence of events that follows the annual cycle the fall of vegetation. We perhaps come back some of those phrase area and ideas of the solar Cycles the seasonal cycles and the cottage is decorated through these Associated ideas.

Williamson said this but in seeking out those Grassroots workers of Magic the Wise Women and witches.

Then the which the West country which was dedicating her life her whole life to the close contact and communion with the spirit world. He once described the museum as a spider's whack it drew the visitors inside and that Graham Kings reconfiguration of this the installation of Joan.

As this inspiration for craft skills and expertise radically re-changes this experiential connection with the past, but it brings it to the center rather than in the shadowy corners where Cecil Williamson had had left it.

But it's an invitation still an invocation of these things.

So where I'd like to kind of bring these to a close is while contemporary modern witches have been urged to recognize the limits of documentary history to recognize that 20<sup>th</sup> century formation as a highly creative process.

Was recognition that it doesn't have ancient Roots at the same time. There are these alternative ways to engage with the Deep past and rather than seeing it as fixed and linear taking up these more embodied and emotional ways.

Approach the past through these expanded historicities through walking through materiality and I want to leave you with.

a poster from Cecil Williamson Time that is now the sale in Simon costumes Museum this kind of come drink from the cup of forbidden knowledge this invocation to magical practice. But I think it also helps shift these ideas about history and expanded historicities and this notion of how do we know? How do we evaluate these different criteria? How does the past become available through these forms of presence and practice to understand through feelings and emotions and through the imagination rather than through objective looking.

So I think of those walks that I took all the different ideas about practice and they've become ways of thinking about connecting to the past about telling these stories. It's not I think either history or something else, but it's about these different ways of thinking through and experiencing with the past under these varieties of dynamic and expanded historicities and that's what I want to leave you in. Thank you all very much.

The Ted K Archive

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